BBD has this

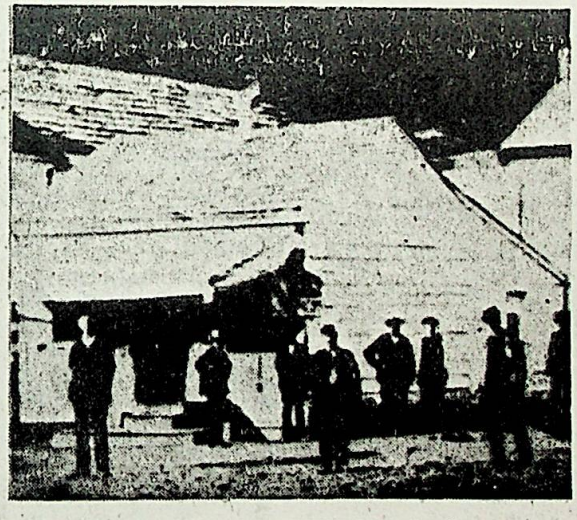
Warm Springs Echoes

(leftovers & byproducts)

by Fred T. Newbraugh

Research, Recall, Reflections & Trivia

THE BISER BOARDING HOUSE after it was enlarged and renamed t Hotel Washington. No more than three or four years elapsed betwe these two pictures of this corner. They are presented to show h George W. Biser was involved in changing the format of two corne in the heart of town. He formed a corporation to build the hotel but he w guiding light in the promotion of it.



THE 1886 PICTURE of the Old Gustin Store Stand shortly after it was acquired by George W. Biser and James F. Smith, Sr., (brothers-in-law) and opened the first Biser and Smith Store on the corner of North Washington and West Fairfax Street.

BISER

The new Recreation Park on Biser Street has been a revelation to many that there is a street by that name in this village and some inquiring minds want to know why it was so named. This was an easy question for me because when I was in high school I boarded at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George W. Biser at about the time he was engaged in subdividing the Ravenswood's farm into lots. I now live on one of the lots.

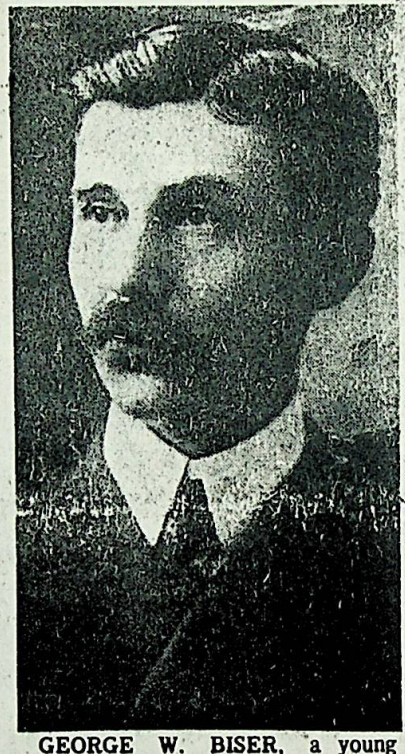
I am printing a biographical account of George Washington Biser exactly as it appeared in West Virginia and Its People by Thomas Condit Miller and Hu Maxwell published in 1913. Some known errors and omissions have been addressed in a statement following the biography as written.

The complete text of the Miller-Maxwell article follows:

One of the most progressive business men and public-spirited citizens of Berkeley Springs is George Washington Biser, who in addition to being actively identified with the mercantile interests of the community has filled with credit positions of trust and responsibility. Mr. Biser is a representative of a family of German origin which has been long resident in Maryland.

(I) Peter Biser, grandfather of George Washington Biser, was of Frederick county, Maryland, his father having emigrated from Germany. Peter Biser followed the calling of a farmer, and in politics affiliated with the Whigs, but was never an officeholder. He married, and was the father of the following children; Adam, mentioned below; Frederick, John, Caroline, and another whose name is unknown. All these children are now deceased. Peter Biser died in Frederick county, where he had spent his entire life, and it was there that his wife also passed away. The former was a member of the German Reformed church and the latter was a Lutheran.

(II) Adam, son of Peter Biser, was born in 1828, in Frederick county, Maryland, where he received his early education in the public schools, later attending night school. He was a farmer as his father had been before him, and in politics was a Re-



GEORGE W. BISER, a young man with vision, ambition and drive, about the time he moved his business from Birch Grove (Ridge), a rural community, to Bath. (Copied from a photo of June Daniels who is a descendent of Peter, a brother of George W. Biser).

Indiana. 9. James, also of Muncie, Indiana, married --------. Mrs. Biser died in Pendleton, Indiana, at the age of sixty-three, and in 1907 her husband died at the same place, being then near eighty years old. They were attendants successively at the Lutheran church, the German Reformed church and the church of United Brethren.

(III) George Washington, fifth child and third son of Adam and Mary Elizabeth (Miller) Biser, was born November 19, 1858, in Frederick county, Maryland. He passed his boyhood in the neighborhood of Pendleton, Indiana, receiving his education in the public schools. After leaving school he was variously employed until coming to Berkeley Springs, where he entered the service of the Tannery Company of that city, remaining seven years. At the end of

Junior Order of United American Mechanics, and is past chancellor commander of the Knights of Pythias, also belonging to the Knights of the Mystic Chain. He is a member of the church of United Brethren.

Mr. Biser married, in September, 1886, Mary Margaret Smith, born May 17, 1852, at Fairfax Court House, Virginia. She is a member of the Presbyterian church. Mr. and

married. 4. Charles W., died, married. 5. James F., marri Miss Unger and has one child Emma F., died unmarried. 7. Ge W.H., died unmarried. 8. Mary M garet, mentioned above. 9. Est F., married Thomas Hodgson has one child. 10. Robert E. H married Fanny Teechiffily and two children. 11. Child, died in fancy. The mother of this family fifty-six years old at the time o death, and the father lived to th

publican, neither seeking nor holding office. He married Mary Elizabeth, a native of Maryland, daughter of Jacob Miller, who were the parents of four other children: Carl, of Farmersville, Ohio, married Kate Swartze and has four children; George, of Dayton, Ohio, married ---------- Funk and has four children; Eli, of Farmersville, married ------; Missouri, also of Farmersville, married John Swartze and has three children. Jacob Miller was a farmer, and died at Farmersville, Montgomery county, Ohio. Mr. and Mrs. Biser were the parents of the following children: 1. Effie, deceased; married John Malden and had one child. 2. Millie, deceased. 3. Peter, deceased; married Margaret Weber, who now lives in Berkeley Springs, and had eight children. 4. John married --------. 5. George Washington, mentioned below. 6. Adeala, married J. McWilliams, of Pendleton, Indiana, and has five children. 7. Ripley, of Frederick county, Maryland; married --------. 8. Dora, married William Kiniman, of Muncie, that time, being then in his twenty-sixth year, he engaged in business on his own account as a dealer in general merchandise. He prospered in his undertaking and is today one of the most active and enterprising merchants of Berkeley Springs. He was the prime mover in the erection of the Washington Hotel, a fine structure of which he is still the owner. The house is filled with guests during the summer months when multitudes are attracted to the world-famous springs. In politics Mr. Biser is a Republican and for many years he has been active in the councils of his party. He served four years as sheriff, filling the office with honor to himself and satisfaction to his constituents. For the same length of time he was president of the board of education, doing much to advance the work of that body. In all that pertains to the welfare of his fellow citizens he takes a generous interest, and any project for its promotion is sure of his hearty co-operation. He has been for fifteen years treasurer of the Mrs. Biser are without children of their own, but have an adopted son, Lawrence Gilbert Horn Biser, now eighteen years old, and attending school in Berkeley Springs. Since his third year he has been under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Biser who have stood to him in all respects in the place of parents. The Biser home is one of the social centers of Berkeley Springs, both Mr. Biser and his wife being known for their genial qualities which have drawn around them a large circle of warmly attached friends.

George W. H. Smith, father of Mrs. Mary Margaret (Smith) Biser, was born near Rose College, Fairfax county, Virginia. He was a Democrat in politics. He married Mary E. Rice, a native of Loudoun county, Virginia, and the following children were born to them: 1. Helen D., married C.F. Elgin, of Poolsville, Montgomery county, Maryland, and has eight children. 2. Jesse, of Leesburg, Loudoun county, Virginia, married Virginia Rhodes and has three children. 3. George, died unvanced age of eight-eight.

Comments

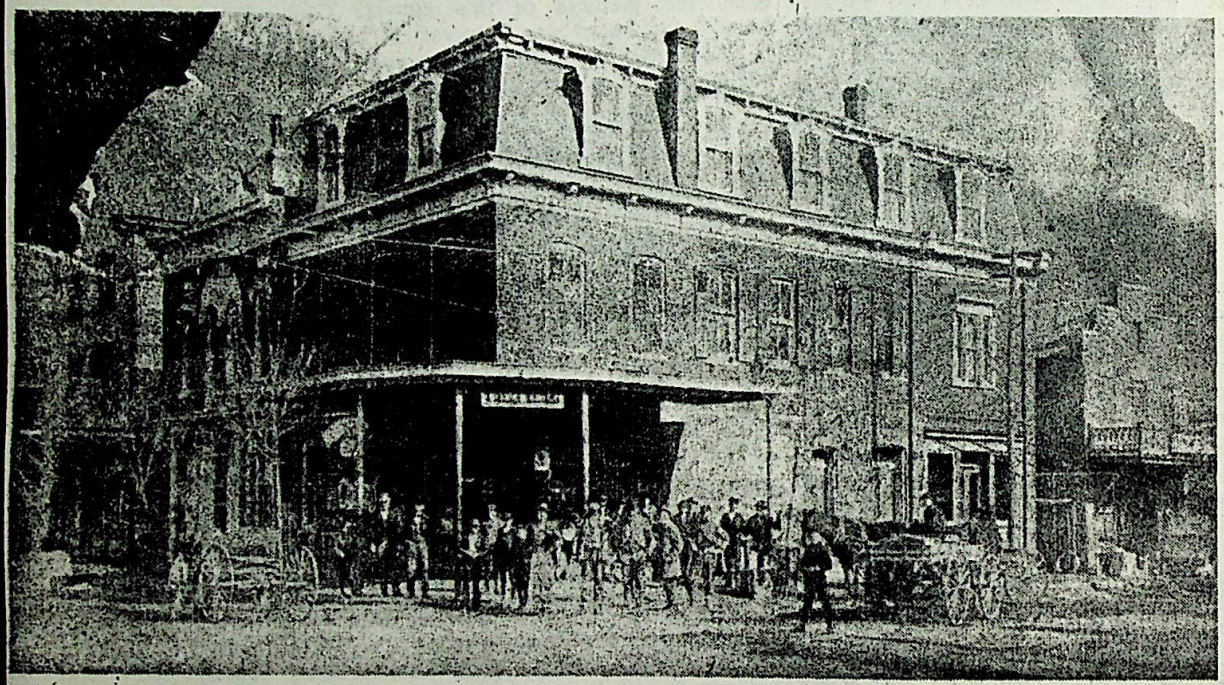
The article should have said that George W. Biser married Mary Margaret (Smith) Rice, widow of Jesse Rice, and the mother of two daughters; one, Willie M., became the first wife of Vernon E. Johnson and the mother of Mrs. Virginia (Johnson) Gorrell, and the other, Claudie, the wife of Dr. J.E. Herbert. When I boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Biser they lived at 515 South Washington Street (where Ted Fearnow lives) and I remember Virginia Gorrell and William and Margaret Herbert visiting there and my recall was that they called her grandma and I called Virginia Gorrell who confirmed it.

In 1913 when this article was written, Peter Biser, brother of George W. Biser, was deceased but his widow, the former Margaret Weber, and eight children, survived him. I do not have a list of all the descendents of Peter Biser but they are numerous in this county, since most of his children were daughters and bear other names. Sometime in the future I may be able to get a complete list of them.

George Washington Biser was a leader in civic, church and political affairs. He was once the owner of Hotel Washington, and subsequent to the time of this article, he was a member of the county court and expanded his business interest.

My perception of Mr. and Mrs. Biser never faltered in the school term 1925-26 that I lived with them. They were both very dignified and at all times a lady and a gentleman. I when they were not properly groomed even in their declining years. He always was dressed with a stiff white collar and necktie even about the house. I value my association with this good lady and good gentleman.

More will be said of the George Biser influence on the development of Morgan County in future columns.



THIS BUILDING REPLACED THE FIRST BISER AND SMITH BUILDING on the corner, now the site of the Philip Kesecker Realty Co. about 1887-88. In fact it is the same building today with a new covering of buff colored brick placed on it by the Citizens National Bank. This picture was more recent because the original building was only two stories and this was after adding the third floor. The building to the extreme left is a part of the old Fairfax Inn. The next brick building was the old Harmison Store Stand, now the office of Dr. William Howerton. The store front in the back of the store was the original home of the Bank of Berkeley Springs. The Bank later purchased this much of the building from Biser and Smith and the vacant space between it and the Charles Johnson Store next to extreme right. They built there a modern bank building which was one of the finest of its day. . .Subsequently the firm of Biser and Smith acquired the now Howerton Building and expanded their operation into it. They altered their original building by opening a store front entrance from Washington Street where the two warehouse doors are shown in this picture. They then rented the corner room with the corner entrance to the Morgan County Bank. They later acquired the building. Smith's interest was subsequently acquired by Albert N. Gorrell and the firm was renamed G. W. Biser and Company. Later it was completely Fairfax Hotel and a new building erected there the G. W. Biser and Company extended their operation into that building and it extended down Fairfax Street and included all the present Dunham Building, now housing the McBee Insurance, Dr. S. I. Nichols and the Hand Craft Shop. They also had some department upstairs. One might enter the Biser Store on Washington Street and exit halfway down Fairfax Street.

50-50 Club Winners

Winners of last week's 50-50 Club giveaway at Hancock American Legion were: Russ Sheppard $25.00; Steve McKinley $15.00; Homer Schetrompf $10.00.

Next giveaway will be held Friday, August 29, at 10:00 p.m. at the Post home - extra bonus if present.